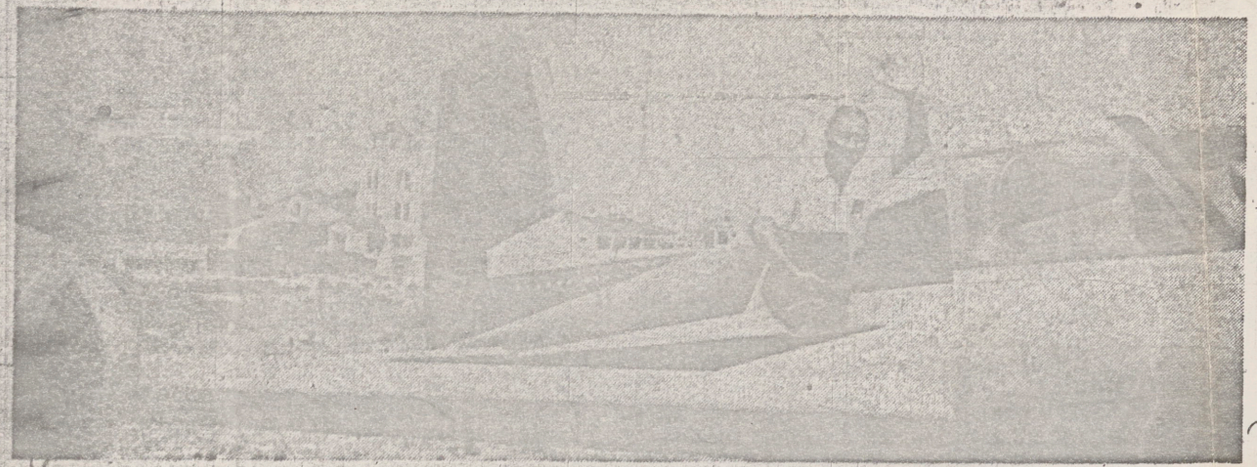
'X' Marks Spot After Planes Leave Grand Central

GNP 7-16-59



—News-Press Photo by Salvador J. Felix

Burbank pilot Bud Furer, one of the last to take off, waves goodby to Grand Central Air Terminal

For the first time in 30 years, historic Grand Central Air Terminal is without planes today. The famed airport officially closed at midnight, and bulldozers will move in immediately and begin cutting up the field, which is being subdivided by the Grand Central Industrial Center.

The last plane took off at 6:45 p.m. yesterday and afterwards airport workers painted a large white X, visible from 1,000 feet up, at the northern end of the deserted strip to warn pilots away. Another X may be added in the middle of the runway.

By 3 p.m. yesterday, all but six planes and one motorboat had departed from the tradition-enriched field, which was dedicated in 1929. The boat remained in one of the tin hangars although its owner had already removed his plane.

Among the last to leave was Tommy Ryan, former football coach, Burbank school official, and operator of flying schools for the last 20 years. It was the second move for Ryan, who came to Grand Central in 1952 when he was evicted by the closing of the East Los Angeles airstrip.

"It's the same old story," Ryan commented. "The taxes get too high to make an airport profitable, so we lose another one."

Ryan, a brother of Mrs. Richard Nixon, had already moved most of his fleet of planes to San Fernando, where the Glendale School of Aeronautics will continue operation under another name.

One of the last planes to leave yesterday was a Champion belonging to Dennis Snell, a missionary for Air Crusades, Inc. He will fly it to Mexico City next week to join several colleagues there.

Another late departee was Bud Furer of Burbank in his Cessna 310. He accidentally locked himself out of the aircraft and was forced to wriggle through the cramped baggage entrance.

A distraught owner scurried about Los Angeles yesterday afternoon trying to obtain wheels for his Stinson, which had no wheels and was unable to take off without them.

"If I can't find any soon," he moaned, "I'll have to get the wings removed and haul away my plane on a truck."

A dozen privately owned planes remained parked throughout the hazy day among patches of weeds that have overgrown the field. W. J. Flanagan, director of administration at Pacific Automation Products, Inc., explained that flights were scheduled even after the 4 p.m. closing deadline set by the airport operators, Grand Central Aircraft Co. The fleet of four PAPI planes, which flies four times daily to San Diego and Vandenberg Air Force Base with important missile parts and technicians, waited for darkness before moving to Lockheed Air Terminal.

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Airport

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A representative of the Agua Dulce airport was on hand to arrange for transfer of the Grand Central hangars, which will be dissembled and taken to his field.

Above the parking areas where Ford Trimotors once loaded and unloaded the daring passengers of the dawning air transport age stands the CAA control tower, deserted for the last two years. It is one of Southern California's landmarks and was used by such famous flyers as Charles Lindberg, Douglas "Wrong Way" Corrigan, Wiley Post, Howard Hughes, Will Rogers and Wallace Beery.

Undoubtedly the most photographed airport in the world, Grand Central served for three decades of film-making as the backdrop for hundreds of motion pictures. In fact, during the filming of "Hell's Angels," the 1930 Jean Harlow-Ben Lyon starrer, a stunt man was killed in a mock aerial gun battle. German and French planes used in movies were kept at Grand Central, and during World War II, P-38s were stationed here to intercept the Japanese bombers that never came.

Now all that remains of the historic airport is a bumpy, 2,800-foot asphalt landing strip, the grayish control tower, and a few dingy, battered hangars. And soon they will be obliterated by bulldozers and demolition crews.